Strengths & Weaknesses of the Cultural Sector

Strengths

Education & Training
- Two post secondary institutions – Brock & Niagara college – energy; talent pool
- Secondary schools/ other educational institutions - from a young age – culture friendly programs
- Post-secondary training in culture
- Huge array of learning opportunities
- Population is informed & educated about culture
- post-secondary institutions – Brock; Niagara College
- Willow bank is unique in its educational program
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Integration/Inclusivity
- Simmering "pot" – with the young
- Ethno cultural diversity
- Growing cultural diversity (ethno cultural diversity) in Niagara
- Richness – diversity
- Youth driven, specifically in music & visual arts
- diversity, discipline variety
- Evidence of youth making Niagara home base to begin new ventures e.g. Suitcase
- Passionate people
- Development of talent & creativity
- Innovation & character
- Cultural workers = great talent pool
- Sharing of information – in heritage; in arts areas
- Sense of appreciation in the community; well received by community
- Good networking opportunities; good access to multiple disciplines

Volunteers
- Core of volunteers – strong if small
- Lots of good people – passion, dedication, volunteers
- strong volunteer community
- Volunteerism is excellent in quality & quantity – both committed groups

Resource Base (geographical/historical/heritage/tourism/multiple disciplines/ physical/people)
- historic stories & contemporary stories
- The geography of the Region has a culture of its own; e.g. escarpment & climate. The Falls, the two lakes, unique geographical landscapes – gives potential for cultural tourism – its inspiring
- Local industries – extension in touring
- Diversity of cultural industries; proximity to other markets
- Geography is an advantage – heritage input in this
- Declining industrial complex opens way for paradigm shift & lower cost of living; transforming the cities is an option
Climate & agriculture – feature of identity that inspires, encourages cultural industry
- Many good attractors for residents & outsiders (tourist draws) – good (“brand”) name recognition
- Climate, geographical features, e.g. escarpment; historical impact is notable
- We live in an area of national & international interest - studied by others
- Strong & visible position in history
- Heritage resources – nature of the region, e.g. 1812
- Heritage – real resources where history happened; notable for the nation
- Sheer quantity of assets
- Rich & diverse history
- Variety that is available = different cultural events
- Strong professional anchor of Shaw
- Strong theatre companies, Shaw & others
- Willowbank example of unique offering
- Something for everybody
- Tourism & promotion – Region is widely recognized
- Diversification: theatre, music, arts, galleries, heritage
- Solid pool of arts professionals
- Good base of collaboration in heritage orgs
- Growing number of emerging professional performing arts companies
- Variety of disciplines
- Long tradition of culture in Niagara – it's imbedded here at grassroots. Rooted and therefore a good number of facilities in the Region
- Great talent pool
- Performing Arts #1; Heritage #2

Leadership
- Bi-National focus
- Enormous potential for unique partnerships
- Good Regional connections. Could mobilize the connections if ever had time & energy
- Potential for downtown revitalization thru arts
- Potential to be original & unique in response to theatre & competition
- Cultural/heritage groups have provincial & national connections
- Momentum of recent years is moving cultural sector forward
- Heritage networking is excellent internal to Region & beyond. Many portals inside & outside Region
- Bi-National opportunities

Weaknesses
**Infrastructure & Development**

- Deteriorating downtowns
- Poverty issues
- Failure to address social issues (poverty)
- Ineffective connections with industrial sector
- Lack of regional transportation infrastructure
- Lack of facilities; opportunity but no place / space for it; performing arts facility is needed; development of existing facilities is needed
- No centralized heritage archive
- Lack of performing arts centre
- Lack of infrastructure for transportation
- Downtowns are on “life support”
- Lack of infrastructure – transportation
- Lack of performing arts centre
- Lack of major art gallery

**Integration / Inclusivity**

- Lack of connections between municipalities
- Competition for tourism $; can’t compete with NFLS
- Marketing $ goes to for-profit sector; chambers of commerce go after “what’s hot” & not connected to arts sector
- Fragmentation of arts/ heritage groups
- Lack of informed media
- Media – lacking; & print media is not supportive
- Lack of media readiness to engage with cultural sector
- Atomization, fiefdoms, insularity, no general marketing, lack of integration & connectedness; lack of communication within cultural sector
- Marketing focused on tourism and it is ethnocentric (white) in focus
- Low visibility / low level of local awareness
- Lack synergy for cross-pollination & to create integration; building of critical masses has not happened; connectivity between sectors is needed
- Lack of awareness amongst residents of Niagara of the value & added benefit of culture
- Weakness in visual arts: neither Rodman nor Riverbrink “ have developed to their potential
- No “respected” commercial gallery in Niagara – no art dealers in Niagara
- Talent leaves – talent exported
- Sectors work in isolation from each other; heritage doesn’t feel like a full partner in the discussion
- Difficulty in finding information about culture
- Poor media; lack of media identity
- Lack of awareness & promotion of health & other social benefits; need more interpretive tools
- Community apathy for culture ; recreation & sport take it
- Speak with multiple voices & therefore no unity
- Lack of pride & awareness
- Wineries do not adequately support Regional culture
- Insular perspective
Community-at-large goes elsewhere for culture; some support, but not enough
Media is weak; nothing encompasses Regional Niagara; media is arts poor

**Leadership**
- Lack of leadership in visual arts
- Lack of coordination & promotion of the huge number of orgs & companies
- Lack of private sector funding; too few for too many mouths
- Lack of visibility
- Lack of political support, not on the agenda
- No clear Regional perspective
- Regional in-fighting
- Lack of support from provincial & federal government; no funding for built & natural heritage
- Lack of support at all levels of government, (and understanding) for all sectors
- Lack of effective heritage policies, e.g. Brownfields – should be first choice for municipal building – not building new
- Misunderstanding of our Region outside of our Region
- Low visibility or recognition for large parts of the Region
- No incentives to save & protect heritage sites or Brownfields
- Limited pool for private sector support
- Lack of education with developers who clear-cut; not adequate legislation; education is lacking

**Economic**
- Arts education has low / no impact
- Arts pays low salaries, poor draw for talent to move / live here
- Socio-economic research is needed to indicate sustainability
- Too hard to make a living through art
- Lack of financial resources
- Under valued assets & underdeveloped assets
- Insufficient funding sources – reliance on private sector – voter doesn’t place value on the investment in culture
- Indirect economic impact is a harder sell in our cultural context

**Resource Base**
- Visual arts is weak; history of weak visual arts
- Territorialism; life-boat mentality; too little resources for the needs across all sectors
- Sandwiched between Toronto & States; we are the drive-by & pass-through
- Colonizing effect of U.S.